United Nations E/CN.6/2012/NGO/72

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
8 December 2011
English
Original: Arabic

Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-sixth session
27 February-9 March 2012
Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives; priority theme: "The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges"

Statement submitted by Sudanese Women General Union, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2012/1.

11-63023 (E) 151211 120112

Please recycle

Statement

The Sudanese Women General Union is a voluntary non-governmental organization that was established in 1990 and has been in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council since 2007. The goals of the Union are as set forth below:

(a) The social and economic development of Sudanese women;

(b) The provision of support and encouragement for the participation of women and girls in academic and scientific education;

(c) The improvement of the environment and women's general health;

(d) The political empowerment of Sudanese women.

In the economic sphere, the Union has concentrated on improving the living conditions of families and, in particular, of rural women. The Union has undertaken a number of economic initiatives designed to combat poverty and alleviate its impact on women. In that regard, the Union has formulated a strategy based on women's economic issues and problems that has resulted in programmes and initiatives which aim to improve domestic living conditions and remove families from the cycle of poverty by means of projects that generate income. Emphasis is placed on rural women, under the slogan "Towards a pioneering role for rural women", and, as part of the promotion of the leadership of rural women, a rural women's innovation prize is presented to women who are outstanding in the fields of agriculture, animal husbandry, food production, handicrafts, solidarity and services. That prize is generously sponsored by Ms. Fatima Khalid, and is awarded to women who carry out productive projects in remote rural areas of the Sudan. Competitors are judged by a central panel. The Union also seeks to use credit unions; it signs financing agreements with banks and has established savings accounts and revolving funds. It is interested in women who work in the various types of non-governmental sectors, and has played a significant part in motivating, developing, promoting and organizing economically active women with the help of funding institutions, which provide funding in the form of soft loans, and by establishing projects that help to alleviate poverty. One such project is the "women's purse", which provides favourable loans and microcredit in all women-related fields. Other projects involve the provision of furniture, the improvement of shelter, revolving funds for the development of rural women and the improvement of the situation of women who sell food, and a project for the funding of seasonal needs, including the needs of schoolchildren and needs arising during religious festivals. Assistance may be in cash or in kind, or in the form of soft loans. Such projects have been implemented in 10 States through the Agricultural Bank of Sudan and the Savings and Social Development Bank. An agreement has recently been reached with the latter to extend the "women's purse" into the States where it had not previously been available. The Union has also signed an agreement with the Zakat Chamber for the funding of a project to provide soft loans for impoverished rural women. Such loans will be in cash or in kind, and will fund projects that generate family income, without the need to obtain funding from banks or provide security: the funding is considered to be a gift or money that is invested with no interest. The Union follows up the use of the grant in order to ensure sustainability. That project has been carried out in 10 States. The Union also has a microcredit project in seven States that involves simple procedures and requires only good faith as security.

Projects that have been funded include such simple commercial operations as the sale of seasonal goods, second-hand clothing and foodstuffs; the manufacture and sale of Sudanese perfumes; and simple commercial and service projects, including the sale of poultry, seedlings and bread. In addition, the Union has been involved in projects that have been carried out through a Union branch of the Family Bank. All of those projects are aimed at increasing the productivity of women and providing support for vulnerable sectors of society; spreading a spirit of solidarity among women; developing small operations into profitable enterprises for rural women and, in particular, women heads of households; providing women with security, stability and protection; developing women's awareness of savings; spreading a culture of microfunding in society and in the target groups; developing the role of rural women in economic and social development; and encouraging women to break out of their traditional roles in production.

With regard to health, the Union, through women's development centres in all States of the Sudan, and in partnership with the federal Ministry of Health, the States ministries of health and health-related organizations, has endeavoured to train health staff in the area of mother and child health. The Union has ensured that at each such centre a health unit provides mother and child health services. The Union has also set up mobile clinics that serve remote rural areas and, with a view to reducing maternal and infant mortality rates, trains midwives under the project "A fully trained midwife for every village", whereby a young woman from each village is chosen and trained for work in her own village. Furthermore, traditional birth attendants have been trained to work in accordance with modern standards.

In the field of education, the Union has conducted campaigns to raise parents' awareness of the importance of girls' education and has worked with the Ministry of Education to ensure that nomadic women and children have access to educational services. The Union has set up kindergartens to provide preschool service in rural women's development centres, with a view to facilitating registration by mothers in various literacy programmes, vocational training courses and skills improvement training programmes, with the aim of generating income.

With a view to the development and well-being of rural women in the Sudan, the Sudanese Women General Union has worked for the advancement of women since it was established, employing all means to empower women, including partnerships with Government ministries and the various United Nations agencies that operate in the Sudan.